

## XVI

### BELGIAN LABOUR PARTY.

---

**Figures.** — At the end of December 1906 the number of our affiliated members was 145,781; at the end of December 1909 there were 161,239; in 1908 there were 183,997 and in 1909 185,316.

The number of groups which in 1906 was 803, amounts now to 906 including cooperative and benefit societies, trades unions and political groups.

The resources of the Central Committee of the Party are very much limited, because the annual subscription paid in by the local federations only represents 10 centimes per member per annum, consequently we dispose of a capital of about 20,000 francs each year for socialist propaganda expenses.

In addition to the salary of the permanent official, the expenses of the bureau amount to about a thousand francs per year; printed matter, pamphlets, notices, manifestos etc., published and brought out by the Committee amount to about 10,000 francs every year, the remainder being paid out in assistance during strikes, lock-outs or industrial crises, for our trades unions and professional associations.

**Elections.** — The Belgian election regime is the one best calculated for the advantages of the conservative classes, as it allows extra votes to taxpayers, landowners, holders of university diplomas and stockholders.

For this reason we have electors with 1, 2, 3 and even with 4 votes for the municipal elections. Let us also add the difficulty which the workingmen have in keeping up a permanent dwelling in the same community, at least in big towns, by which they lose their electoral right for insufficient time of residence (four years for municipal election).



The legislative elections are done by half the country and every two years. So that we have had one election only during our triennial period, that is in 1908. We are therefore obliged to add up the two successive elections to get a total of socialist votes in Belgium.

1909 general election	433,676 votes
In 1902-1904	463,967 »
In 1904-1906	469,094 »
In 1906-1908	483,241 »

This increase represents progress, however slow and sure of the influence of our ideas, part of these votes comes to us through the increase in the number of electors, and the other part is the result of our work; let us add that in 1906 we had 30 deputies and in 1909 35. The number of senators remains at 7 out of 110.

The provincial activity of the Socialist Party has manifested itself to a great extent in the creation, organisation and development of higher education given by the public authorities; this education is relatively poor in our country and is not at all encouraged by the catholic government which has been in power for 25 years.

The municipal activity of our 850 socialist members elected, of whom however barely 700 have joined the national Federation of municipal councils, is principally confined to the defence and extension of municipal administration. Thus when the liberals of Ghent opposed the installation of a school canteen open to all children, the catholics and the socialists voted for this reform and since then have filled the town council excluding the liberals, who resigned. The clerical government has left no stone unturned in order to bring about the failure or to prevent the realisation of measures decided by democratic municipal councils.

Our press seems to have come to a standstill as re-

gards the total number of readers, although the printing of the *Peuple*, *Vooruit*, *Journal de Charleroi* and *L'Avenir du Borinage* runs into large numbers, but it would seem that the profits are made up by readers of the small local papers; the daily papers printed runs to about 142,000 numbers.

**School.** — The Central Committee of the Belgian Labour Party has followed Germany's example by instituting a socialist school, weekly in 1908 and twice weekly in 1909. Our best theorists and militants have developed there questions which are most important and necessary for the education of young people coming to the Party. It was the intention of the founders of the school principally to form young recruits, capable of taking a place in the ranks of the militants, as regards political, trades union, co-operative and other socialist labour forms of organisation. Let us add that our example has been followed at Ghent, Huy and Liège, where classes have also been instituted.

**Congress.** — Annual congresses shall examine questions of the highest importance, as well as questions of internal organisation.

In consequence of Belgium's taking over the Empire of the Congo, our party was faced by the colonial problem some months after the decision of the Stuttgart Congress.

Long and heated debates took place in our Congress of April 1908 and finally the following agenda was adopted :

- « The Congress,
- » Considering that socialists can only be connected
- » with the colonial enterprises of bourgeois govern-
- » ments, on condition they accept some of the res-
- » ponsibilities in the exploitation of which the native
- » populations of capitalist colonies are inevitably
- » the victims;
- » Considering on the other hand, that the declara-



» tion of principle of the labour party devolves upon  
 » socialists the duty of undertaking the defence of  
 » all those who are oppressed without distinction of  
 » race;

» Declares that the socialist representatives, by not  
 » voting against the proposed annexation of the  
 » Congo, would go contrary to the principles con-  
 » firmed on several occasions by socialist national  
 » and international congresses;

» Denounces to workingmen the abominable regime  
 » of spoliation and servitude which is now raging in  
 » the Congo;

» And, on the hypothesis of annexation, invites  
 » socialist representatives to fight inch by inch to  
 » insure the acknowledgement of the rights of the  
 » Belgian Parliament, the abolition of absolutism  
 » and compulsory work, the establishment of a re-  
 » gime of efficacious protection for the native popu-  
 » lation;

» The Congress requests the Central Committee to  
 » instigate intense agitation in the country in order  
 » to raise public opinion against the annexation of  
 » the Congo. »

The Congress of 1909 examined the attitude of our  
 representatives in Parliament on the occasion of their  
 vote for a law reorganising military service in our  
 country, and the following agenda was almost una-  
 nimously voted by the delegates present :

« The Congress,

» Recalling article 10 of the programme of the La-  
 » bour Party :

» Abolition of armies and transitorily armed na-  
 » tions;

» Requests the groups of the labour Party to ac-  
 » centuate the propaganda against militarism and as  
 » regards the attitude of the socialist representatives  
 » in Parliament, declares itself in favour of a demo-  
 » cratic reform of the military laws, which by put-  
 » ting an end to the regime of substitutes and

» conscription, without increasing the charges, would  
 » constitute a step in the direction of the armed na-  
 » tion;

» Proclaims, that in no case, can the socialist re-  
 » presentatives give their consent to a proposition  
 » which would entail a still greater increase of the  
 » military charges with which the country is bur-  
 » dened. »

Finally an extraordinary Congress was organised  
 on February 6, and 7, 1910 for the purpose of taking  
 a position on a very important question and which has  
 absorbed many socialist parties : Participation in the  
 government.

It was 202 votes against 100 given for two diffe-  
 rent resolutions, that the Belgian Labour Party ac-  
 cepted the following agenda :

#### « General policy.

» Considering that the Labour Party, without  
 » compromising the interests in its keeping, cannot  
 » systematically support a bourgeois ministry, nor  
 » can it undertake beforehand systematically to  
 » render existence impossible for a government resol-  
 » ved to make those urgent democratic reforms which  
 » the labour class demands;

» The Congress,

» Declares that it is of the greatest interest to Bel-  
 » gian workingmen that the clerical majority should  
 » be turned out, and that no single bourgeois party  
 » should be in the majority in Parliament;

» Warns the labour class against the dangers of a  
 » policy which under pretext of an anticlerical coali-  
 » tion, would attack the independence of the Labour  
 » Party;

» Draws the attention of militants to the necessity  
 » of declaring that under all circumstances after the  
 » victory of opposition parties, the Labour Party  
 » shall keep full and entire liberty of action; that its  
 » policy shall be what it has always been, a class po-



» licy; that its attitude to all governments which  
 » shall be formed, shall be inspired solely by the  
 » higher interests of proletariat and shall depend  
 » notably on the attitude taken by the government in  
 » regard to *universal suffrage* and other political or  
 » social reforms, whose realisation is pursued by the  
 » labour class. »

#### « Participation in government.

» The Congress,  
 » Considering the resolutions of the international  
 » congress of Paris, confirmed by the international  
 » congress of Amsterdam :  
 » Declares :  
 » 1. That in accordance with the decisions of these  
 » congresses, it refuses first of all, to admit  
 » as possible the individual participation of certain  
 » socialists in any cabinet whatsoever, without the  
 » consent of the labour party; should such be the  
 » case, the said socialists would have to resign be-  
 » cause of the Party and the Labour International;  
 » 2. That moreover, the question of government  
 » participation is a « question of tactics and not of  
 » principles » (resolution of Paris), which would  
 » have to be solved by a congress of the Party, on  
 » the day when it would be put practically;  
 » 3. That the political mission of the Labour Party,  
 » which is principally to protect the interests of the  
 » labour class and to propagate the most radical  
 » solutions and those nearest to their revolutionary  
 » ideal of social transformation, has up to now been  
 » carried out, especially under its critical aspect and  
 » that of opposition, but that the time will come  
 » when it will have to manifest itself under its  
 » constructional and governmental aspect that then  
 » the Labour Party will be able to assume the respon-  
 » sibilities of power, and by more and more perfect  
 » approximation, will be able to realise its immediate  
 » programme and its ideal programme. »

The Belgian Labour Party entertains the most friendly relations with the organisations of other countries. Thus it is always represented as a guest at the socialist party congresses in France and in Germany; in addition to the help sent to the victims of Russian reaction they sent a delegation to the funeral of the celebrated revolutionary Guerchouni; they took the initiative in getting up a subscription for the Spanish friends for creating a socialist daily paper; in the same way they helped the revolutionary movement in the Argentine Republic. The Labour Party also did its best to intervene in the great economic conflict of Sweden; if the sum sent was not large, it was because our funds were exhausted by support in long and numerous strikes in Belgium.

**Trades union organisation.** — The number of members affiliated with the trades union Commission of the Labour Party and of the independent trades unions, increases steadily each year.

In 1906	there were	42,490	affiliated members.
In 1907	»	57,840	»
In 1908	»	67,418	»
In 1909	»	72,000	»

The number of members of trades unions who take part in the class struggle was :

In 1906	: 127,166	members.
In 1907	: 138,763	»
In 1908	: 125,943	»

The decrease in the number of members of trades unions during 1908 is brought about by extraordinary unemployment as a result of the great crisis through which Belgian industry had to pass in that year.

We have been able to ascertain that the power of resistance of our trades unions is steadily increasing; the average amount of subscriptions paid by the members increases irregularly.

In 1907-1908 it stood as follows :



	Per month.	Per member.
Alimentation	1.60	—
Building	1.02	1.48
Wood	1.23	1.36
Coachbuilding	2.42	2.57
Schoemaking	1.23	1.40
Metallurgy	2.02	2.05
Tobacco	2.61	2.91
Textile	1.63	2.03
Transport	1.57	1.60

During the last three years most of the trades unions affiliated with our National Trades Union Central have endeavoured to transform the basis of their organisation. The federative system is continually losing ground in place of national trades unions.

We are progressing towards modern trades unionism whose object is to concentrate the forces of the organised proletariat against the combined forces of the employers.

**Cooperation.** — The *Federation of Cooperative Societies* is gaining more and more ground in our little country; at the end of December 1909 it comprised 174 adhering societies with 140,730 members who had paid a capital of 1,942,266 francs 17 centimes.

The annual sales of the cooperative food societies amounted to 40,655,358 frs. 84 and the profits realised were 3,855,443 frs. 90.

The landed property possessed by the cooperative societies of distribution amounts to 14,837,114 frs. 28 and they employ a staff of 2,123 persons.

As the Cooperative societies have to support the local organisation everywhere, very few of them have up to now respected the decision to devote 1/2 % of the profits to propaganda through the press; however sometime since they decided in favour of gratuitous subscription to consumers, at the expense of the cooperative societies; that is to say that in addition to materiel welfare they also provide for intellectual welfare.

## XX

# SERVIA

Following the report of our Party for 1906, we would point out that during the last three years political life in Servia has been comparatively quiet. However, the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of 1908, was the cause of tremendous national excitement in the country which was almost transformed into war action. Fortunately at the end of this crisis, the former quiet was again restored, but with considerably increased militarism.

The policy of our bourgeoisie has recently been principally decided by these two forces. The conflict between the two radical Parties which has remained undecided, during the Skupshtina election of June 1908, led to a coalition, and this government was supported by a strong majority in Parliament. On the other hand the customs difference with Austria Hungary threatened to place the country in a difficult economic position.

Our Party took part during this time in the Skupshtina elections in 1908 in a few towns and again retained the seat in Kragujevac; they carried on without interruption the struggle which a social democratic has to carry on always and everywhere, but gave quite special attention to their internal development and reinforcement. Thus the numbers of organisations was increased, the number of Party members